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ABSTRACT

Arguing that assessments of student progress describe the consequences of the interaction of the multitude of elements that make up the educational system, this paper examines the three-tiered assessment system used at Redhill Technical College (RTC), in Surrey, England, to fulfill diagnostic and motivational functions for the college as a whole. Introductory material presents the student as part of a broad system, rather than as an isolated entity; argues that changes in the educational system will lead to changes in student performance; and suggests that student assessment should diagnose the weaknesses and strengths of the system which do not attach to particular students. After discussing the purposes to be served by assessing student progress and the success with which the college is operating in relation to the student, progress monitoring is examined in terms of its role as a diagnostic tool. The argument is put forth that student assessment should include the monitoring of information about the performance of the class as a whole, enrollments, and other aspects of the educational system, and the value of this kind of information for students and educators is underscored. Next, the monitoring system used at RTC is described, followed by a review of the three main tiers for the publication of assessment data: the principal's annual report to the governing body; the presentation of departmental data to the academic board and other college bodies; and the report on departmental progress to members of the departments. (HB)

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Monitoring Student Progress
and
Publicising The Results

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JC 840 406

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MONITORING STUDENT PROGRESS AND PUBLICISING THE RESULTS

A Paper presented at the Further Education Staff College, Coombe Lodge, Study Conference, 'College Management Information Systems'. November 3rd 1976

D T L Jones, Principal, Redhill Technical College

1 THE STUDENT AND THE SYSTEM

The process of learning in an educational establishment is achieved through the interaction of a multitude of elements directly or indirectly associated with the organisation. One can loosely classify those elements of the system within the establishment in terms of those which mainly attach to the individual student, those which are largely dependent on his teacher and thirdly, those which are descriptive of the other resources within the organisation which contribute to the learning process.

All of these elements contribute to the performance of the individual student and therefore play a part in determining his progress. The student centred elements of the system can be described in terms of the innate ability of the student, his interest in the particular subject of concern, the strength of his motivation to learn that subject, the time he spends on the subject, his previous attainment on preparation in that subject and so on. The contribution of the teacher is clearly dependent on his ability to convey information, his rapport with the individual student, his exploitation of teaching aids, his ability and desire to motivate the student, his ability to make the student work hard and so on.

In addition the organisation includes elements such as library facilities, teaching aids, private study facilities, workshop and laboratory resources which clearly play an important part in the educational process.

Less directly involved with the organisation are a set of elements based on the student's domestic situation. The facilities for work provided at his home, the degree of support and encouragement from his family, the time allowed by his domestic commitments to study; all these play a part in determining his progress.

It follows that results that purport to describe the progress of a student do not characterise that student as an isolated entity but describe the consequences of the interaction of the multitude of elements that make up the system of which the student is but a part. Were the same student to be implanted in a system in which the other elements were changed, then it would be no surprise to find a different degree of progress.

Such considerations lead to the questioning of methods of assessment and uncertainties regarding the value of examinations and the interpretation of their results. They also focus our minds on the importance of supporting resources such as libraries, teaching aids and private study facilities and encourage us to concern ourselves with the domestic and social anxieties of students through our counselling services and place in proper context the considerable importance that attaches to the concept of good teaching.

The fact that in the main the results that are obtained by a student at the close of his educational experience are seen as characteristics of that student in isolation when viewed by prospective employers for example, encourages us to persist with the label "student assessment". In endeavouring to analyse and improve the service that our educational organisation provides it is important that we recognise and accept the concept of system assessment even though the assessment results finally from the performance

of the individual student. We must be alert to the fact that the assessment is representative of the whole complex of elements of the system and as such enables us to diagnose weaknesses and strengths within the system which do not only attach to particular students.

2 MONITORING THE SYSTEM

The assessment of student progress serves several purposes. It provides an indication of the degree of success with which the system is operating in relation to that particular student. In providing an objective, it motivates the system to perform and develop in a manner which will further the educational interests of the individual student and as long as the assessment information is portrayed in appropriate ways it can serve as a diagnostic aid in revealing weaknesses in the system which can then be repaired.

The extent to which assessment information serves the diagnostic and motivation function in relation to the system as a whole depends very much on the nature of the information that is retrieved and the manner in which it is used.

2.1 PROGRESS MONITORING AS A DIAGNOSTIC TOOL

Traditional quantitative assessments of student progress include such items as examination results, homework and classwork marks, attendance records and in practical subjects, laboratory or workshop and practical examination marks.

The value that can be gained from this information in order to learn about the performance of the system depends very much in the way in which it is presented. Generally speaking the more information about the various parts of the system that can be brought together the better are our chances of making a proper diagnosis about the state of the system. Indeed if only limited parts of the system are brought under inspection the conclusions that are reached can be dramatically wrong.

Take for example the results of Bloggs for Physics, or rather of the system which incorporates Bloggs represented by the following line of marks:

	Attendance	Homework	Lab Work	Theory Exam	Pract Exam
Bloggs A	70%	40%	60%	30%	55%

This is oftentimes the only form in which the information is received by Blogg's parents, his Head of Department and others than his Physics teacher and could well lead to the conclusion that despite his likely practical bent Bloggs is the weak link in the system of which he is a part inasmuch as he is a lazy student, irregular in attendance and general application and who really is not suited to the study of Physics. Suppose now that the organisation requires the publication of the marks for the whole of the group which includes Bloggs and reveals an average set of marks as follows:

Average	76%	48%	58%	32%	58%

The attention now turns to the teacher element and one begins to suspect shortcomings in terms of possible teaching expertise, inability to motivate the students, insufficient vigour in pursuing absences, irregularities in assessment or some other similar reason. Bloggs in fact now appears to be an about average performer who no longer deserves dismissal from the course.

However, further investigation might reveal:

Course	Year of Course	Number Enrolled	Number of Students at Assessment
OND Physics	1	15	10

Suspicion is now aroused by the high drop-out rate for the course and spotlights the student selection system and the Head of Department who is responsible for it. Indeed one's sympathy now goes to the teacher who is trying to cope with this unfortunate group and one even begins to applaud Bloggs for persisting on a course for which he is probably unsuited.

Other interpretations may follow when one inspects for example the attendance records for the Department as a whole, the drop-out rates on other courses and trends in pass rates over the years. Consistently poor results in Physics practical work throughout the Department might for example suggest inadequate laboratory facilities or shortages in technician support or insufficient time allotted by the timetable.

In order to fully exploit progress monitoring information as a diagnostic tool it is not sufficient just to make appropriate measurements but it is also necessary to take care in correlating the results through careful display in order to reveal information about the various aspects of the system which determine the performance of individual students.

2.2. PROGRESS MONITORING AS A MOTIVATOR

The importance of progress monitoring, especially as represented by the final course assessment, as a motivator to better and more effort by a student is generally accepted. The use of progress monitoring as a stimulus to the system as a whole, that is, as a device for motivating the system to respond in ways which will better serve the needs of the individual student is exploited less. The system has been described as a partnership of people including the student and his teacher as major components, but also including Heads of Department and other staff and their various attributes and efforts together with a complex of aids over which they exercise control.

Inasmuch as the results of the performance of the individual student are representative not only of himself and his particular teachers but of the system as a whole it follows that the system can properly attend to inadequacies that are revealed only if the evidence is available to all elements which activate it. The system is than able to respond through its chains of responsibility in ways which will enhance the prospects for individual students. With the example of Bloggs, the charateristics of Bloggs as an element of the system are revealed to his teacher through his row of results. The characteristics of the teacher Bloggs partnership are revealed to the Head of Department through the wider aspect presented by the overall results of the students in charge of the teacher. Continuing the progression, the characteristics of the various elements that make up the Department are illuminated to those outside the Department as well as those within through a consideration of the totality of the results which obtain for the Department as a whole. The performance of the College as a system is presented through a correlation of results which reflect on the level of achievement of all elements within the system.

One is describing the need for each human component in the system to be held to account for performance through the wide publication of the results of the monitoring process. The motivation then results from the exposure of performance through this evidence.

The impetus towards improvement follows from the natural desire of the human elements in the system to earn pride in performance, as individuals, jointly as members of a Department or to contribute to a corporate pride as members of the total College system.

As long as monitoring information which reflects on the system as a whole is restricted to isolated pockets within the system, or as long as the various pieces of the information jig-saw puzzle are kept apart then the pressures of accountability and of personal and group reputations are not properly activated and the impetus to improve is subdued.

The collection of information, even all of the right information, is not in itself sufficient. To take full advantage of information as a diagnostic tool and system motivator the manner in which the information is presented and used is of critical importance.

3 MONITORING IN PRACTICE

At Redhill we identify three main tiers for the publication of assessment data. The widest promulgation occurs through the Principal's Annual Report to the Governing Body which is published each November and is made available to staff, students, Heads of neighbouring schools and colleges, the Authority, local employers and HMIs with a particular interest in the College. Copies lodged with the Library are also available to the public at large. This could be described as unconfined publicity and is the document through which the College accounts for its activities. Consequently it must present data in sufficient detail to properly describe the performance of the total College system to the community at large to which the College sees itself as being accountable. Clearly there is a danger of excessive detail which could disenchant the less directly involved reader and submerge the main threads of accountability. On the other hand the information must be sufficiently revealing to motivate the system towards better performance in the future.

In addition to a variety of data and information relating to many other aspects of the College the report reflects on the degree of success of the system in terms of student performance through the type of information shown in the extract of a table in Appendix I. By means of this table the College publishes the results in terms of course success rates for every group of students in each of the Departments.

In addition the table reveals information about drop-out rates through a comparison of the denominator in the final column which represents the number of examination entries, with the corresponding figure for numbers enrolled. Noticeable discrepancies between these numbers and in terms of examination results attract attention and demand an explanation.

The table also provides information about the duration of the course and enrolment trends and although this data is relevant to the total description of system performance it, together with other information in the report is more concerned with resource utilisation.

The second tier of publicity is confined to the College system and is concerned with that information through which a Department accounts for its activities to the system as a whole. With respect to student performance the information is largely a matter of academic concern and the account is properly rendered to the Academic Board.

This is achieved through a standing committee of the Board entitled the Student Assessment Committee which is chaired by the Principal and draws members from each Department below the rank of Head of Department; the membership being renewed each year.

Information is brought to this Committee by means of a Broadsheet for each course in the College which is presented towards the end of the session. The Broadsheet, shown in Appendix 2, is completed by the Course Supervisor for the 18 or so students for whom he is responsible from information received from each of the subject tutors that the students encounter.

When the Broadsheet has been completed to the satisfaction of the Head of Department it is forwarded for review by the Student Assessment Committee who, eventually, in discussion with the Head of Department either adopt it as an official College document and the basis of each student's sessional report or refer it back to the Department for more attention. In this way student reports are monitored before they leave the College and in addition any discrepancies in student attendance, course work and examination results whether they attach to particular subjects or individual students are brought to the notice of the Department. Consequently the work and results of the efforts of a member of staff are brought to the attention of colleagues from all Departments and this provides a strong incentive to protect individual and Departmental reputations.

The Student Assessment Committee also reports back to the Academic Board in more general terms with respect for example, to trends in attendance records and the overall quality of report writing by staff.

It could be argued that these tactics for motivating the system to improve are too late to benefit the students on whom the assessments reflect. One would observe that the students in any year reap the benefits of the assessments made on students the previous year, and staff respond in anticipation of the publicity that the fruits of their efforts will receive.

Nevertheless, a third tier is required which will respond more quickly to deficiences in the system for the benefit of existing students and this is essentially confined to the Departmental sub-system. Different techniques are adopted by different Departments and one which is recommended and partially adopted at Redhill is the regular scrutiny of assessments through a group review conducted by the Head of Department. Ideally all immediately relevant members of the system are gathered together to review the state of progress of a student. In practice this involves bringing together a student with his Course Supervisor and subject tutors into a meeting chaired by the Head of Department so that all can consider and reflect on the progress made by the student. Here again one is able to look at a range of information representative of those elements of the system which affect the student and in addition the student is able to contribute his observations about the system as he sees it. This monitoring technique is adopted at key points in the progression of a student through the College, for example, within a month or two of embarking on a course to ensure that he is on the right programme and to provide an initial motivation, and towards the end of the course to determine the examinations to be entered and to engage in careers guidance as appropriate.

In all three cases a major motivating factor is the anticipation of publicity. Staff and students are aware that these processes will be followed in coming months and are sensitive to the need to render as good an account of their activities as possible. No member of the system is protected by secrecy.

The account rendered by the Annual Report is of considerable concern to all staff; Heads of Department and their staff are fully aware that Broadsheets expose the fruits of their efforts, and although the motivation in the internal Department review procedure is directed mainly at the student, it is impressed upon the staff who partner him in the system that their efforts and diligence are factors which considerably influence the progress represented by the assessment of the student.

4 CONCLUDING NOTE

A major function of an information network is to motivate a system, through the response of its human elements, to better performance, To do this, one is relying on the motivation of individuals induced by human needs reacting to the nature of the system. One can identify what has been described as the hierarchy of needs (A H Maslow, Motivation and Personality, 1954) ascending in the order: physiological needs, safety and security, social or belonging needs, status and recognition needs and then ego needs.

The suggestion is that needs move up the hierarchy as successive needs are met. The end of the hierarchy describes needs which express the desire to be associated with team work (social), the need to have the importance of one's work properly recognised (status) and the need to have a sense of achievement and through this obtain satisfaction (ego).

The proper publicity of the efforts of the individual as part of the system or team amplifies the recognition of team membership, it advertises the importance of the individual and he is motivated to achieve the publicity of even better results to satisfy the final link in the needs chain.

APPENDIX 1

COURSE ENROLMENTS 1975/76, and SUCCESS RATES, 1974/75

DEPARTMENT OF ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Course Title	Year of Course	Average Hrs/wk over yr	Enrolments 1974/75	Enrolments 1975/76	Course Success Rate 1974/75
FULL TIME					
OND Technology	1	30	13	10	90%/11
OND Technology	2	30	8	10	63%/ 8
General Engineering	1	30	13	38	93%/13
City & Guilds					
Preliminary Engineering	1	30	9	14	88%/ 8
MV Stage I	1	17½	7	14	100%/ 7
'O' Level Physics (A)	1	5	21	23	27%/22
(E)	1	5	21	21	16%/13
'A' Level Physics - 1st year	1	5	7	15	100%/ 7
'A' Level Physics - 2nd year	2	5	16	12	79%/14
'O' Level Chemistry	1	5	14	16	35%/20
'A' Level Chemistry 1st year	1	5	13	16	100%/13
'A' Level Chemistry 2nd year	2	5	11	12	73%/ 1
'O' Level Biology (D)	1	5	19	15	40%/15
(E)	1	5	19	18	42%/19
A1 Biology (B)	1	5	22	16	100%/22
(E)	1	5	-	9	-
A2 Biology	2	5	16	19	90%/16
'O' Level Human Biology	1	5	22	27	55%/18
'O' Level Technical Drawing	1	5	17	21	25%/18
'O' EWT	1	5	11	6	100%/ 9
PN 1 General Science	1	5	21	26	92%/24
PN 1 Human Biology	1	5	21	26	86%/21
PN 2 General Science	2	5	19	15	40%/15
PN 2 Human Biology	2	5	19	15	67%/15
PART TIME DAY					
ONC	1	12	9	13	63%/ 8
ONC	2	12	13	10	70%/10
City & Guilds 200	1	12½	10	18	57%/ 7
City & Guilds 205	1	12½	13	6)	100%/13
City & Guilds 205	2	9	6	14)	100%/ 5
City & Guilds 255	1	9	12	11	100%/ 9
City & Guilds 255	2	9	5	16	100%/ 4
City & Guilds 255	3	-	9	-	100%/ 9
City & Guilds 255	4	9	5	8	60%/ 5
City & Guilds 231	1	7½	14	-	100%/ 8
City & Guilds 231	2	7½	12	-	100%/12
City & Guilds 231	3	7½	5	12	100%/ 5
City & Guilds 380	1	7½	17	14	100%/17
City & Guilds 380	1	7½	17	-	100%/17

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Appendix 2

IBN 12-A

COURSE SUPERVISOR'S NAME -

DEPARTMENT - _____

COURSE - _____

YEAR - _____

SESSION - 19 - 19

BROADSHEET

Rockhill Technical College

(CONFIDENTIAL)

SURNAME & FORENAME(S)	SUBJECTS - 1				2				3				4				5				6			
	Attendance	Classwork	Homework	Examination	Attendance	Classwork	Homework	Examination	Attendance	Classwork	Homework	Examination	Attendance	Classwork	Homework	Examination	Attendance	Classwork	Homework	Examination	Attendance	Classwork	Homework	Examination
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AVERAGE FOR COURSE -	/				/				/				/				/				/			

Course Supervisor's Remarks | Remarks (INTERNAL ONLY) | Recommendations

Course Supervisor's signature _____

Approved by Head of Dept _____

Approved by Review Board (if necessary) _____

REVIEW BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS

(These can be reviewed before any final approval by Chairman)

Fractional marks not be awarded. Ten marking scale is to be used - A EXCELLENT B GOOD C SATISFACTORY D UNSATISFACTORY E POOR

Letters marked * may be used for Departmental purposes etc.

Attendance to be shown as actual percentage if possible

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